

Leaders build Leaders

While God is the ultimate One responsible for all leader development, and the entire church community is responsible for the holistic development of the leader, the primary “hands-on” responsibility for building leaders resides in leaders themselves.

He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him... (Mark 3:14)

Mark 3:14 summarizes the first aspect of Jesus’ primary method of building leaders: “that they might be with Him.”

Leaders Build Leaders

By themselves, teachers don’t build leaders, although they are an important part of the process. By themselves, books, curriculum and courses don’t build leaders, although they can help.

Leaders build leaders. It takes a leader to impart the vision, passion, courage and strategic perspectives of leadership.

Consequently, our approach to leader development must not be a curriculum “package” that we hope will work “all-by-itself.” Our materials are only tools (hopefully good ones) that will work in the hands of a mature and qualified leader. The skill does not lie in the tool but in the hands of the craftsman. Additionally, we should expect each leader to take the tool and use it differently, each according to his own unique situation, needs and style. The tool should never rule.

Leaders Build Leaders Personally

Leader development is accomplished best by leaders who personally work with the emerging leaders and give general oversight to the impact of the other influences in their lives and ministries.

This was what Jesus did. Jesus formed His leaders personally. He called all His disciples by name (Matt. 10:1-4). He called them first to be “with Him.”

He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. (Mark 3:14-15)

Leaders build leaders, and Jesus took personal responsibility for each of the leaders He built. He did not delegate this to some other training entity, like one of the many “schools” of His day. If leadership merely consisted of knowing a set of facts and mastering a few competencies, then the great task of building new leaders could be delegated to someone else.

But leadership first consists of knowing God.

And after that, leadership involves issues such as proper relationships with others in a community of accountability, support and servanthood. It involves deep and complex issues of character and personal calling, and knowing how to think conceptually and strategically. Only a leader who first has come to some level of personal maturity in these areas himself can lead another new leader into experiential maturity. These things cannot properly be taught in a classroom; they can only be shared in the context of life.

When you consider the most profound influences upon your own life, do you think of a book or a course, or do you remember a person (quite likely people) who impacted your life and ministry? The actual life experiences of most leaders confirm this biblical reality that leaders build leaders!

The Example of Jesus

Of course, Jesus' disciples were not always physically present with Him. There were times when Jesus was alone with His Father (e.g., Mark 1:35) or when He gave them tasks to do on their own that He knew would help them grow and mature (e.g., Luke 10:1). However, Jesus still personally designed the various transformational experiences He gave His disciples.

Thus, Jesus built His new leaders "with Him." Jesus' personal influence was what they became known for:

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13)

They lived with Jesus, walked with Him, talked with Him, ate with Him, rested with Him and they watched Him in every situation. They saw how He lived, how He reacted, how He dealt with good people, how he dealt with bad people. They watched how He prayed to His Father, how He lived and ministered entirely out of the indwelling life of His Father. They watched Him heal the sick, cast out demons, miraculously feed the multitudes and raise the dead. They watched Him in victory; they watched Him experience the (apparent) defeat of His rejection and death on the cross. They watched Him cry over Jerusalem; they watched Him agonize over the hypocrisy of His people; they watched Him wrestle with the shortage of true laborers for the harvest. They saw how He exposed the false religious traditions of self-righteous men; they watched Him affirm the genuine purity and faith of the broken. They watched Him talk to God when things were going well and they watched Him pour out His heart to His Father as He struggled and "learned obedience" (Heb. 5:8).

Jesus built leaders who were "with Him." He did not do it at a distance; He did it closely, He did it personally. He did it properly.

Hearing and Seeing

In the training of the twelve, both hearing and seeing the words and works of Christ were important (Luke 1:1-4; Matt. 13:16-17; Mark 4:34).

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. (1 John 1:1)

Jesus taught them His Word (Mark 4:34) and demonstrated to them the power of the kingdom (Matt. 11:4-5). It is not enough for leaders to teach the emerging leaders; they must also demonstrate what they are teaching.

Paul also taught his emerging leaders how to live both by his example and by his teaching:

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice... (Phil. 4:9)

Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. (Phil. 3:17)

The Priority of Leader Development

Essentially, Jesus came to the earth to do three things: to die on the cross for the sins of humanity, to reveal the Father and proclaim the Kingdom of God by His words and works, and to build a small group of leaders who would then build His church. That's all He did!

In applying this to ourselves, thankfully, we do not have to die on the cross for humanity's sins, since Jesus has accomplished that once and for all. So we are left with only two core responsibilities – to do the ministry work and to build leaders.

Sadly, many Christian leaders have been too busy with leadership to build leaders. We have, artificially and unbiblically, separated the two. While we have focused on proclaiming the Kingdom and revealing the Father – that is, doing the “ministry stuff” – we have often not embraced personal and systematic responsibility for building leaders. Instead, we have sent our emerging leaders off to other “experts” – usually academics – hoping that they would do it for us.

Jesus did both. Moreover, He always did both. Every time He did ministry He took advantage of that opportunity to build leaders. Every time He built leaders, He accomplished ministry work at the same time. His example shows us that there is no better way to do ministry than by building leaders, and there is no better way to build leaders than by doing ministry.

We need to reconnect the two – leaders do ministry work and they build leaders at the same time.

In this biblical paradigm, leaders embrace personal responsibility for leader development as a core part of what it means to be a leader. This shift alone has the potential to address both issues of quality (as mature leaders impart the vision, passion, courage and strategic perspectives of leadership) and quantity (as every leader takes personal responsibility to build leaders).